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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

No. 10 TORONTO December, 1941

FORT STE. MARIE UNEARTHED!

What's so unusual about finding a hen's egg? Nothing, perhaps, except when that egg happens to be one of the first ever laid in a new country. Last summer a party from the Royal Ontario Museum were quite excited when they unearthed an egg which must have been laid in the early 17th Century by a hen brought into Ontario by the Jesuit missionaries.

Some of the Museum staff were excavating the ruins of Fort Ste. Marie, near Midland, which is the oldest building in Ontario, and among the earliest in Canada, since it was started in 1639, two years before the founding of Montreal. It was begun by Father Brebeuf to serve as a central residence for all the Jesuit priests then working among the Huron Indians.

Besides the egg, many important things were excavated; iron trade axes, glass flagons, metal ornaments, and a medal cast in honour of the first two Jesuits, Loyola and Francis Xavier. These things were all imported into Canada by the Jesuits, but many objects of native origin, such as stone pipes and pottery, were also found.

About a third of the area has now been cleared; when the work of scientific excavation is completed, the Jesuit Order hopes with the evidence established to reconstruct the buildings exactly as they were in the middle of the 17th Century. By so doing an important and very dramatic phase of our Canadian history will be illustrated.

AFTER DINNER WASSAIL

Wouldn't you like to top off that Christmas dinner with a bowlful of wassail? What's that?

Picture for a moment a banquet in the days of Queen Elizabeth. Although their usual diet was monotonous, their feasts were elaborate indeed. There were tapestries on the walls, perfumed rushes on the floor, and banners floating from the rafters overhead, half obscured in the light from the smoking torches. Near the great central fire the red, greasy faces of the cooks and attendants glistened and shone. After the boar's head, the peacock, and the quaint "subtleties" came the wassail bowl or posset pot.

Would you like to make some wassail? Here is the recipe: Mix slowly two wine quarts of sweet cream with the yolks of nine or ten fresh eggs and the whites of four. Heat this slowly over fire stirring constantly until it thickens. Now boil together one-half pint of sack, three-quarter pound of sugar, three or four nutmegs and some cinnamon sticks. When scummed and very hot pour slowly and from varying heights into the custard.

Bowls, like the one that you may see in the Royal Ontario Museum, are the proper method of serving the tasty beverage.

CHRISTMAS VISITORS

The Christmas season and birds are linked together. John Citizen thinks of the turkey, goose and chicken. The naturalist's thoughts turn to the annual census of wild birds. Men throughout the continent carefully search small areas and tabulate the names of the species present and the number of individuals.

From many such reports a picture of the movements of the bird population can be formed. This year promises to be an unusual one. Birds such as grosbeaks, snowy owls, Canada jays, and crossbills which usually are restricted to the north have been reported from the south. What causes this desertion of homeland? Food seems to be important. For example, the snowy owl in the far north subsists chiefly on the lemming, a small, mouse-like animal, which is also the mainstay of the Arctic fox. The Goshawk depends upon the partridge for sustenance. The Canada jay eats wild berries to a large extent in the fall. When their respective foods in the north fail, these birds appear to rove southwards in search of new sources. These matters are not completely understood at present.

The Royal Ontario Museum receives and files for reference reports concerning the changes in animal life of the province. The study of this information leads to an understanding of the warp and woof of nature. It will reward us with the pleasure of knowing and, more practical, may guide us in the wiser exploitation of our wildlife resources.

MUSEUM EXHIBITS IN MOTION

Bring your classes to the Royal Ontario Museum to study objects in the galleries. Then watch a motion picture which is related to the objects you have seen. For instance: See a boomerang and then watch it being thrown in the picture "Daily Life of the Australian Aborigine." Examine a volcanic rock and then see it being made in the film "Volcanoes." Study the objects in the Eskimo gallery and they will be made more real in the "Wedding of Palo." Look at the gannet and its relatives close up in the bird alcove and then learn more about it in the moving picture "Private Life of the Gannet."

These are only a few of the films shown to illustrate museum objects.

During the Christmas holidays a number of films will be shown in the museum theatre. Children are invited to come at 2 p.m. on any of the following days: December 30 and December 31; January 2 and January 3.

Open WEEK DAYS except MONDAY 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
SUNDAYS 2 p.m. - 5 p.m.